

ADVENT: WEEK THREE

day 20

Joy In the Midst of Pain

Luke 2:33-35



Simeon's prophecy demonstrates that JOY co-exists with everything else we experience, including pain. Simeon could have ignored this painful truth; he could have chosen to bask in the beautiful experience of holding the very son of God. But he followed the prompting of Holy Spirit. His obedience surely prepared Mary's heart in some small way for what was to come. We know from her encounter with the shepherds that Mary was prone to pondering, so these words were surely with her long after Simeon uttered them. Rather than running from God in light of this pain that was destined to pierce her very heart, Mary embraces the BOTH/AND nature of the task of bearing and raising the Son of God. She gets the wonder and beauty of watching this child grow in wisdom and in grace, of seeing Him minister as a young man, and of witnessing countless lives forever changed by a moment with Him. At the same time, she gets the unimaginable pain of seeing her son rejected, even by his own family and neighbors, and ultimately seeing him tortured to death. She sees Him risen again and then has to experience an earthly parting. Time and again, Mary must choose to press into God in the midst of intense earthly pain. Pressing into the Father in the midst of pain is perhaps the most difficult task in preserving our joy. But as C.S. Lewis said "When we see [God's] face, new strength fills us, and we have a revelation: our painful circumstances hurt him more than they hurt us. He grieves for our loved ones and our sad circumstances more than we do." As Mary watched her Son grieve for the people He encountered, she saw the heart of her Heavenly Father on display. He was moved with compassion time and again for His people. Jesus was better at recognizing the damage done by sin, the pain of His creation, than anyone else who has ever lived. And yet He never lost His joy. In fact, He tells His disciples, "My purpose for telling you these things is so that the JOY that I experience will fill your hearts with overflowing gladness!" (John 15:11). Jesus has joy alongside grief and sorrow; He never hid from or distracted Himself from the painful realities of this fallen world. He wants His followers to live with His never-ending supply of joy in their most celebratory seasons and their most painful ones. Sarah Clarkson beautifully expresses the tension inherent in celebrating advent in the following work; read it prayerfully and see what needs Holy Spirit brings to your attention today.

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EXCERPT FROM “ADVENT WITH MARA” BY SARAH CLARKSON

But Advent isn't a season in which we force ourselves to be sad, it's the season in which we come to grips with how grieved we really are. In Advent we remember that we are still waiting. Christmas is when we remember that Christ has come to defeat death and 'overcome the world'. But Advent is when we remember that we are still in that world. We are children of God, inheritors of glory, and we still get cancer, we still fight wars, we still suffer loneliness, and death. Advent is when we have the chance to stop running and be still, the season that allows us to recognise our need for Christ's final coming to right the suffering of children, the loneliness of the poor and forgotten, the grief of the sick, the darkness crouched in our own hearts.

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